

2. Structure of U.S. Agriculture

■ Farming Regions

The 10 major farm production regions in the United States differ in soils, slope of land, climate, distance to market, and storage and marketing facilities. Together they comprise the agricultural face of the Nation.

The Northeastern States and the Lake States are the Nation's principal milk-producing areas. Climate and soil in these States are suited for raising grains and forage for cattle and for providing pastureland for grazing. Broiler farming is important in Maine, Delaware, and Maryland. Fruit and vegetables are also important to the region.

The Appalachian region is the major tobacco-producing region in the Nation. Peanuts, cattle, and dairy production are also important there.

In the Southeast region, beef and broilers are important livestock products. Fruits, vegetables, and peanuts are grown in this region. Big citrus groves and winter vegetable production areas in Florida are major suppliers of agricultural goods. Cotton production is making a comeback.

In the Delta States, the principal cash crops are soybeans and cotton. Rice and sugarcane are also grown. With improved pastures, livestock production has gained in importance. This is a major broiler-producing region.

The Corn Belt has rich soil and good climate for excellent farming. Corn, beef, cattle, hogs, and dairy products are the major outputs of farms in the region. Other feed grains, soybeans, and wheat are also important.

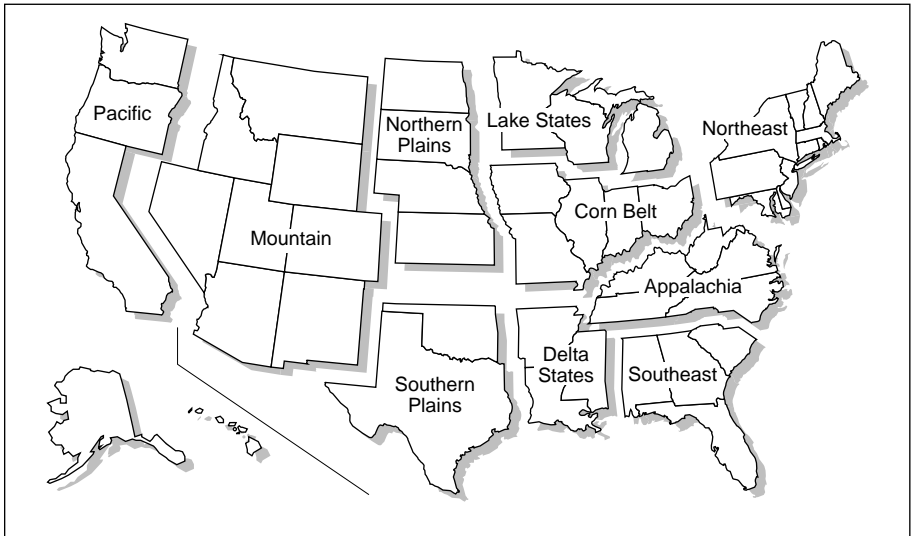
Agriculture in the Northern and Southern Plains, which extend north and south from Canada to Mexico, is restricted by rainfall in the western portion and by cold winters and short growing seasons in the northern part. About three-fifths of the Nation's Winter and Spring wheat is produced in this region. Other small grains, grain sorghum, hay, forage crops, and pastures form the basis for raising cattle. Cotton is produced in the southern part.

The Mountain States provide a still different terrain. Vast areas of this region are suited for raising cattle and sheep. Wheat is important in the northern parts. Irrigation in the valleys provides water for such crops as hay, sugar beets, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables.

The Pacific region includes the three Pacific Coast States plus Alaska and Hawaii. Farmers in Washington and Oregon specialize in raising wheat, fruit, and potatoes; vegetables, fruit, and cotton are important in California. Cattle are raised throughout the region. In Hawaii, sugarcane and pineapples are the major crops. Greenhouse/nursery and dairy products are Alaska's top-ranking commodities.

Figure 2-1.

U.S. farm production regions



■ Farms and Land in Farms

The United States had 2.19 million farms in 1998, up fractionally from 1997. A farm is defined as any establishment from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold or would normally be sold during the year. The number of farms declined less than 1 percent, overall, during the period 1988 through 1998.

Land in farms continues to decline slowly; the total of 954 million acres in 1998 is down 0.2 percent from a year earlier and down 4.1 percent from 1988. Land in farms has declined every year since reaching its peak at 1.206 billion acres in 1954. The average size of farms decreased from 452 acres in 1988 to 435 acres in 1998, while the number of farms declined at a smaller rate over the same period.